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Evolution

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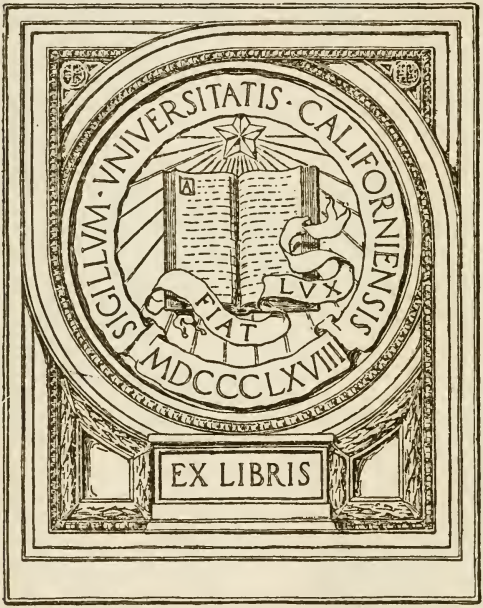

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"When you were a tadpole
and I was a fish."

Evolution

A Poem

by Langdon Smith

Decorations by Fred S. Bertsch

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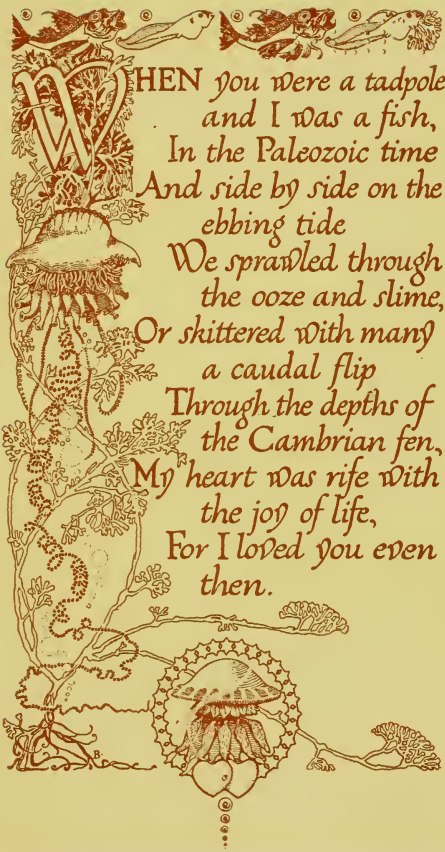
WHEN you were a tadpole
and I was a fish,
In the Paleozoic time
And side by side on the
ebbing tide
We sprawled through
the ooze and slime,
Or skittered with many
a caudal flip
Through the depths of
the Cambrian fen,
My heart was rife with
the joy of life,
For I loved you even
then.

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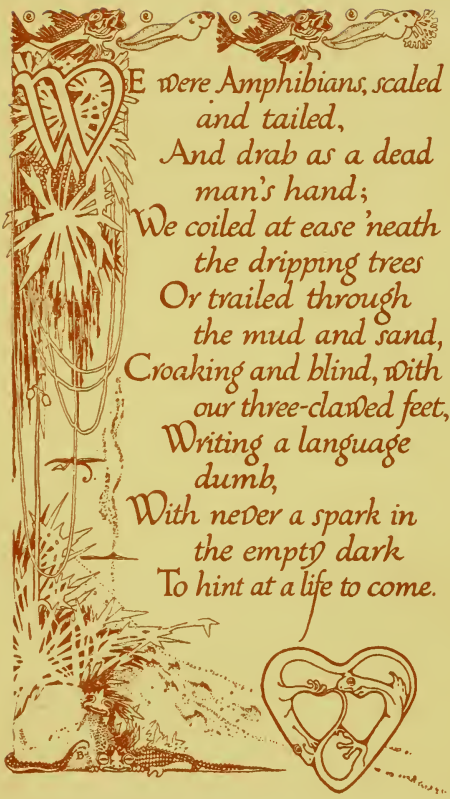
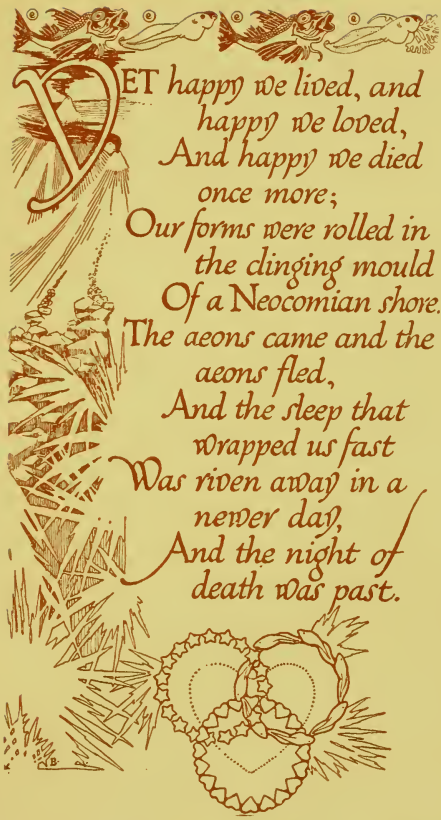
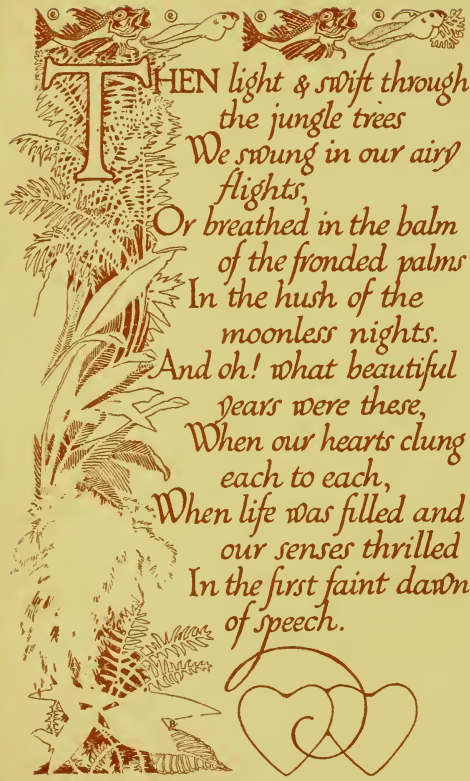
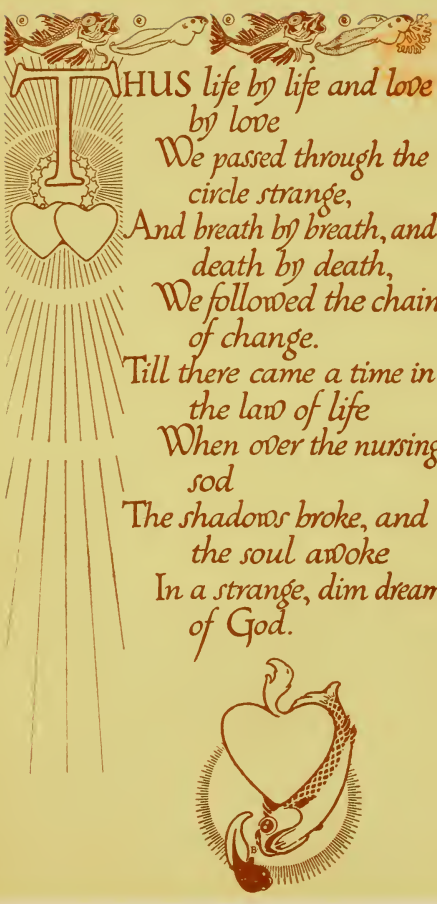
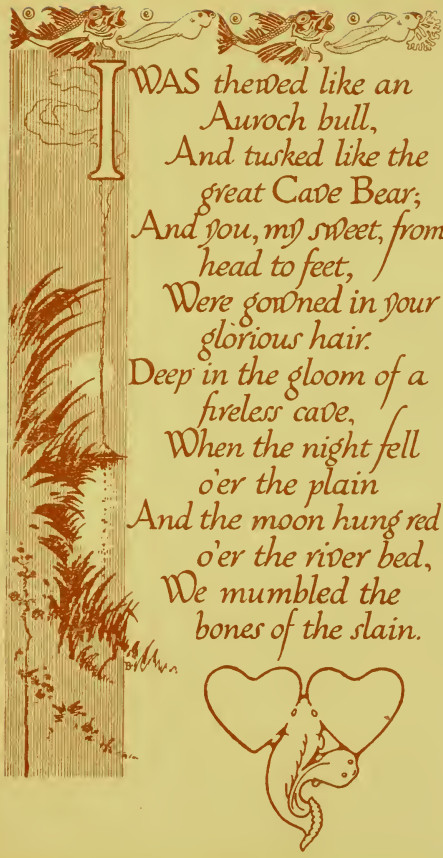
MINDLESS we lived and
mindless we loved,
And mindless at last
we died;
And deep in a rift of
the Caradoc drift
We slumbered side
by side.
The world turned on in
the lathe of time,
The hot lands heaved
amain,
Till we caught our breath
from the womb of death
And crept into light
again.


WE were Amphibians, scaled
and tailed,
And drab as a dead
man's hand;
We coiled at ease 'neath
the dripping trees
Or trailed through
the mud and sand,
Croaking and blind, with
our three-clawed feet,
Writing a language
dumb,
With never a spark in
the empty dark
To hint at a life to come.

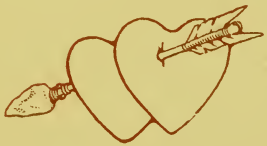

YET happy we lived, and
happy we loved,
And happy we died
once more;
Our forms were rolled in
the dinging mould
Of a Neocomian shore.
The aeons came and the
aeons fled,
And the sleep that
wrapped us fast
Was riven away in a
newer day,
And the night of
death was past.

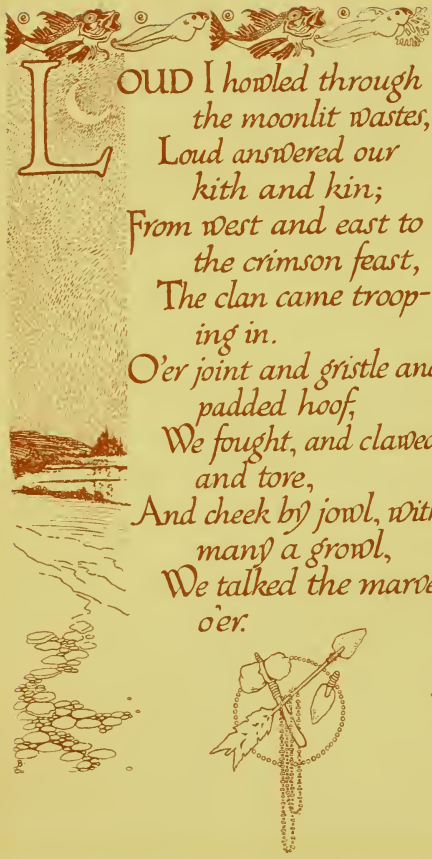

THEN light & swift through
the jungle trees
We swung in our airy
flights,
Or breathed in the balm
of the fronded palms
In the hush of the
moonless nights.
And oh! what beautiful
years were these,
When our hearts clung
each to each,
When life was filled and
our senses thrilled
In the first faint dawn
of speech.


THUS life by life and love
by love
We passed through the
circle strange,
And breath by breath, and
death by death,
We followed the chain
of change.
Till there came a time in
the law of life
When over the nursing
sod
The shadows broke, and
the soul awoke
In a strange, dim dream
of God.

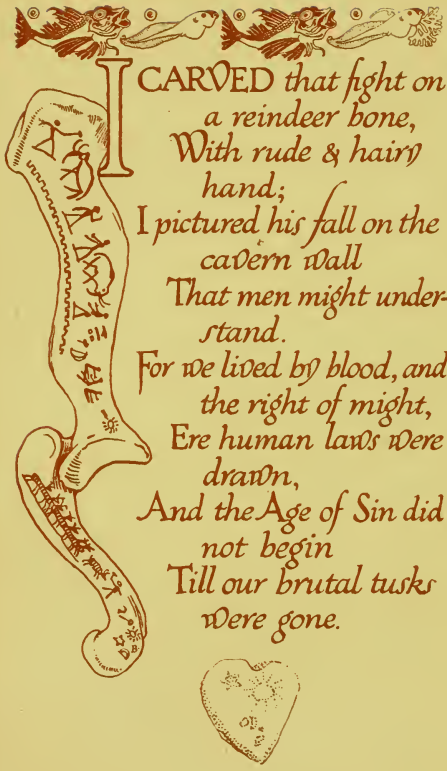

I WAS thewed like an
Auroch bull,
And tusked like the
great Cave Bear;
And you, my sweet, from
head to feet,
Were gowned in your
glorious hair.
Deep in the gloom of a
fireless cave,
When the night fell
o'er the plain
And the moon hung red
o'er the river bed,
We mumbled the
bones of the slain.

I FLAKED a flint to a
cutting edge
And shaped it with
brutish craft;
I broke a shank from
the woodland dank
And fitted it, head and
haft.
Then I hid me close to
the reedy tarn,
Where the Mammoth
came to drink;
Through brawn & bone
I drave the stone,
And slew him upon
the brink.

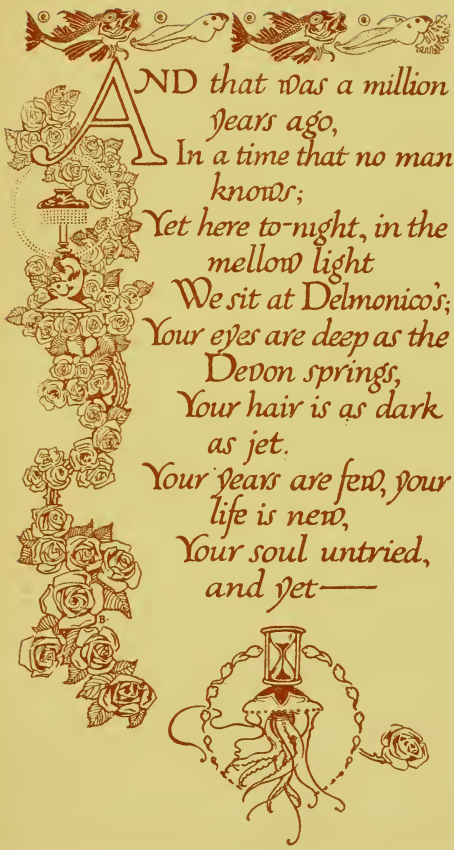


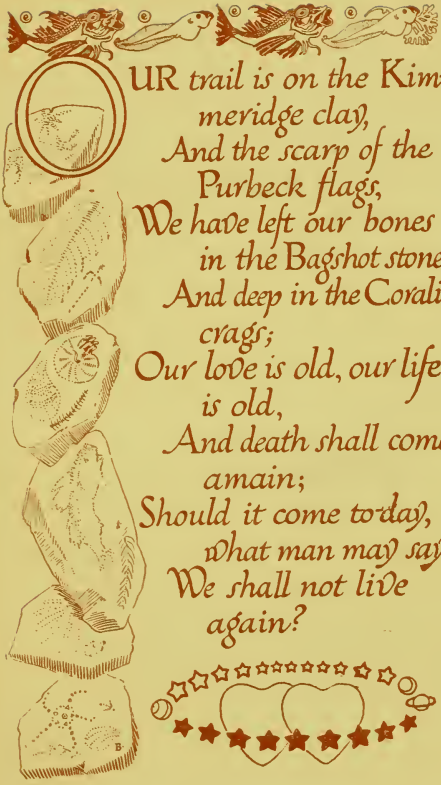


LOUD I howled through
the moonlit wastes,
Loud answered our
kith and kin;
From west and east to
the crimson feast,
The clan came troop-
ing in.
O'er joint and gristle and
padded hoof,
We fought, and clawed
and tore,
And cheek by jowl, with
many a growl,
We talked the marvel
o'er.



I CARVED that fight on
a reindeer bone,
With rude & hairy
hand;
I pictured his fall on the
cavern wall
That men might under-
stand.
For we lived by blood, and
the right of might,
Ere human laws were
drawn,
And the Age of Sin did
not begin
Till our brutal tusks
were gone.


AND that was a million
years ago,
In a time that no man
knows;
Yet here to-night, in the
mellow light
We sit at Delmonico's;
Your eyes are deep as the
Devon springs,
Your hair is as dark
as jet.
Your years are few, your
life is new,
Your soul untried,
and yet——



OUR trail is on the Kimmeridge clay,
And the scarp of the Purbeck flags,
We have left our bones in the Bagshot stones
And deep in the Coraline crags;
Our love is old, our life is old,
And death shall come amain;
Should it come to-day, what man may say
We shall not live again?

GOD wrought our souls from
the Tremadoc beds
And furnished them
wings to fly;
He sowed our spawn in
the world's dim dawn
And I know that it
shall not die,
Though cities have sprung
above the graves
Where the crook-boned
men made war,
And the ox-wain creaks
o'er the buried caves
Where the mummied
mammoths are.

THEN as we linger at
luncheon here,
O'er many a dainty
dish,
Let us drink anew to the
time when you
Were a Tadpole and
I was a Fish.

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